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ABSTRACT

Noting that the development of fundamental movement skills is basic to children's motor development, this booklet provides a guide for early childhood educators in planning movement experiences for children between 4 and 8 years. The booklet introduces a wide variety of appropriate practices to promote movement skill acquisition and increased physical competence. By focusing on the three fundamental movement skills--stability, locomotor, and manipulative skills--the booklet provides a guide for developing all-rounded movement instruction for young children. Fundamental movement skills are defined and examples of each type of skill are delineated. Activities to develop movement skills are then described, including exploration and problem-solving activities, rhythmical activities, games, and play stations. The booklet also includes tips to help teachers engage and support children's interest in physical activity. The book concludes by noting that offering children opportunities for planned and spontaneous movement experiences will help them develop movement skills which will allow participation in a wide range of sports and activities. (Contains 24 references and a list of 16 resources on movement in early childhood.) (KB)

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Fundamental Movement in Early Childhood

Linley Campbell

Contents

Introduction	2
What are fundamental movement skills?	4
Activities for developing fundamental movement skills	5
Teaching tips	13
Conclusion	16
References	17
Resource list	18

About the Author

Linley Campbell is a lecturer in Physical and Health Education at Edith Cowan University in Western Australia. She has lectured early childhood and primary teacher-education students for the past 28 years. After a lifetime involvement in the sport of calisthenics—as a competitor, coach, and adjudicator—she was recently awarded the Australian Sports Medal in recognition of her services. Linley is committed to working with teachers, helping them to plan and implement movement experiences which provide children with opportunities to become competent, confident, and creative movers.

This book is designed to guide early childhood educators in planning movement experiences for children aged between four and eight years. It introduces a wide variety of appropriate practices to promote movement skill acquisition and increased physical competence. In particular, it looks at types of movement activities that carers/teachers may include in their programs to develop children's stability, locomotor, and manipulative skills.

The development of these fundamental movement skills is basic to children's motor development. To deny children the opportunity to master these skills is to deny them the opportunity to become confident, competent, and creative movers. This in turn will limit their opportunity to experience the joy of efficient movement, and the social and health benefits of physical activity. This book will allow early childhood teachers and carers to reflect on their practice in the area of motor skill development, so that children entrusted to their care get the best possible start towards fulfilling their movement potential.

Introduction

Young children love to move. Movement is at the very centre of their lives. We need only observe children for a few moments to notice how difficult it is for them to remain still. This innate urge to move is integral to children's development and learning. Children need to develop their movement skills through a variety of movement experiences in order to understand themselves and the world around them. Research and current curriculum documentation provide evidence of the importance of motor skill development and physical activity in the early childhood years.

- Children do not automatically develop proficient movement skill patterns. Progression to the mature stage of a fundamental movement skill depends on a variety of experiential factors, including opportunities to practise, encouragement, and quality instruction in an environment conducive to learning (Hand, 1996; Malina & Bouchard, 1991).
- The most critical period for learning motor skills occurs between the ages of two and seven. During these years, children are eager to move and are generally fearless in terms of risking physical injury, personal failure, and the taunts of their peers. Furthermore, they are relatively unhindered by a history of negative learning experiences and inaccurate movement patterns from incorrect learning (Gallahue, 1996).
- The specialised motor skills used in sports and movement activities in later life are built on the fundamental movement skills acquired during childhood. Mastery of these basic movement skills is essential if children are to become skilful movers in games, sports, dance, gymnastics, and recreational activities (Gallahue & Ozmun, 1998).
- Children with poor movement skills have been found to be less successful on assigned school tasks, prone to more off-task behaviours, suffer reduced fitness levels, and experience frustration and failure throughout their early years (Hand, 1996). They also frequently experience ridicule from their peers in the playground and exclusion from playground activities (Revie & Larkin, 1993; Hand, 1996; Wetton, 1997).
- A number of authors highlight the value of teacher intervention in the development of children's fundamental movement skills (Kelly, Dagger &

The most critical period for learning motor skills occurs between the ages of two and seven

Walkley, 1989; Schiller & Schiller, 1991; Cullen, 1993; Ignico, 1994). Developing these skills in a 'play' context is also considered vitally important in the early childhood years (Taggart & Keegan, 1997; Jones, 1989).

- The need to provide movement programs which teach and assess fundamental movement skills has been identified at the federal level; for example in the 1992 Senate Inquiry into Physical Education and Sport. At the state level, Western Australia has recognised the importance of developing fundamental movement skills during the early years of schooling in its current curriculum documentation *Health and Physical Education: Outcomes and Standards Framework—Student Outcome Statements* (Education Department of Western Australia, 1998).
- There is a growing concern for the health status of Australian children. Children are becoming less fit and more overweight. Consequently, many of them are at risk of developing heart disease, high blood pressure, and other related illnesses (Shilton, 1997). However, the impact of physical activity on children's wellbeing goes far beyond these physiological and public health concerns. For example, it has been shown that children who are physically active have higher levels of self-esteem (Brown & Brown, 1996).

What are fundamental movement skills?

Fundamental movement skills embrace a broad spectrum of basic skills which serve as foundations for the acquisition of more advanced sports skills. They are sometimes referred to as the *movement ABC*. Fundamental movement skills are commonly classified into three categories: stability, locomotor, and manipulative movements (Gallahue, 1996).

Stability skills are considered to be the key aspect of learning to move. These skills enable children to control the balance of their body while stationary and in motion. Activities such as stretching, twisting, and body rolling fall into this category.

Locomotor skills are those that transport the body from place to place; for example running, jumping, and skipping. Development and refinement of these locomotor skills is essential, as they enable children to explore and participate in the world around them.

Manipulative skills involve handling (with either hands or feet) objects such as bats and balls. Acquiring efficient manipulative skills increases a child's potential for successful involvement in games and sports of various kinds (EDWA, 1997). The table below (Gallahue, 1996, p.38) highlights the activities included in each movement category.

Table: Categories of fundamental movement skills

Stability Skills	Locomotor Skills	Manipulative Skills
bending	walking	throwing
stretching	running	catching
twisting & turning	jumping	kicking
swinging	hopping	trapping
inverted supports	skipping	striking
body rolling	sliding	volleying
landing/stopping	leaping	bouncing
dodging	climbing	ball rolling
balancing	punting	

Activities for developing fundamental movement skills

Young children need planned opportunities to develop skills and attitudes that nurture and promote their ongoing motor development. This next section presents a variety of developmentally appropriate movement activities. The provision of a variety of movement experiences is considered essential in developing children's depth and breadth of skill proficiency. Consequently, children will have a greater capacity to move with ease and will be able to vary their movements to meet the needs of any situation. These activities provide opportunities to develop and refine fundamental movement skills, and to explore, invent, and create with movement. Remember, encouraging motor development is too important to leave to chance. You can make a difference for children by making movement important and fun.

You can make a difference for children by making movement important and fun

Explicit fundamental movement skill instruction

Provide specific fundamental movement skill instruction and teach children, by way of modelling and scaffolding, how to perform these skills. Use word cues to help them 'feel' the quality of each movement and to emphasise the main components of each skill. For example, when they are balancing on various parts of their body, remind them to squeeze their muscles tightly; no wiggles or wobbles. When they are practising catching, emphasise watching the ball, reaching forward with 'soft' hands to bring it in safely.

Exploration and problem-solving activities

Movement exploration and problem-solving activities are ideal for developing fundamental movement skills. Laban's (1963) movement concepts of body, space, effort, and relationship can be used to guide these types of experiences. An exploratory approach involves posing movement questions to children. This approach has several benefits. It is child-centred and gives children the opportunity to explore and experiment with their locomotor and stability skills in various ways. As this approach focuses on experimentation and creativity, it allows children with special needs to have a great deal of flexibility when choosing the movements they are capable of performing. Furthermore, through guided

questioning, the teacher can ensure children are exposed to the full spectrum of movement possibilities. This is particularly the case when considering the development of stability skills. The teacher can deliberately plan questions which have children practising these skills in both stillness and motion. For example, the stability skill of stretching may be explored in the following way:

- *Can you stretch up high? Be like a very tall building as you stretch. See if you can stretch to touch the roof.*
- *How wide can you stretch? Be very still; I am going to take a photo of your stretch. Let's see if you can travel in this stretched shape.*
- *Try stretching just one side of your body. What does it feel like? Now try stretching the other side.*
- *Can you stretch slowly? I will count to 5. Try to make your stretch last until I reach 5.*
- *Can you stretch your body along the bench/under the table? Try to make your body as strong as the bench/table.*
- *Can you copy your partner's stretched shape? Squeeze your muscles tightly as you stretch.*

Manipulative skills can be explored using this same movement exploration approach. The manipulative skill of throwing may be explored in the following way:

- *Try throwing the ball up high in the air. Pretend it is a rocket taking off to the moon.*
- *Try throwing the ball as far as possible. Put a beanbag where it stops. Try throwing the ball again. Did you throw further this time?*
- *How fast can you throw the ball? Pretend it is a speeding bullet.*
- *Now try throwing the ball slowly (as if in slow-motion). What does it feel like? Did it go further than when you threw quickly?*
- *Can you throw the ball with one hand, the other hand? Which hand feels stronger?*
- *Can you throw the ball over your shoulder, under your legs?*

Rhythmical activities

While the primary purpose of rhythm activities is to develop children's understanding of and feel for the basic elements of rhythm, they provide further opportunities to enhance locomotor and stability skills, both alone and in combination. Practising fundamental movement skills in a rhythmical context reinforces the development of coordinated movement. The following

rhythmic activities have a strong fundamental movement skill focus.

Can you stretch up high?

Copy Cat

Children are freely spaced. The carer/teacher leads the children in a variety of locomotor and stability movements to music. Children copy the movements and change as a new movement is introduced. Movements suitable for performing in personal space include: jumping, hopping, marching, bending, stretching, twisting, turning, rising, and falling. As children become familiar with the activity and the types of movements that can be used, they may enjoy leading the activity themselves. By organising the class into small groups or pairs, more children will have the opportunity to assume leadership roles. This allows the teacher more freedom to identify and work with children needing individual attention.

Follow the Leader

The carer/teacher leads a line of children across the floor, using a variety of locomotor activities. The children copy the leader and follow in line. Galloping, sliding, skipping, jumping, and leaping activities may all be used. This activity may become known as 'our happy dance'. For variety, animal walks such as lions, elephants, bears, and crabs may be introduced. Again, once the children are familiar with the activity, they may enjoy being the 'leader' of the class or group.

Circle Rhythms

The children are seated or standing in a circle. In turn, a variety of walking, marching, galloping, skipping, and jumping music is introduced. The children listen to the

music and, when selected, travel around the circle, using the appropriate locomotor skill. Children not selected may clap the beat or rhythmic pattern.

Well-known action songs such as 'London Bridge', 'The Seven Steps', 'The Hokey Pokey,' and 'Musical Statues' are always favourite rhythm activities. Artists such as The Wiggles, The Hooley Dooleys, and Mike Jackson have produced more up-tempo action songs, such as 'Walk', 'The Monkey Dance', 'Shake Your Sillies Out', 'Everybody', 'Ping Pong Ball', and 'Bear Hunt', which are popular with young children today (see Resources, p.18). Their words guide the movement actions to be performed.

Rhythm activities can be made more exhilarating with the addition of scarves, ribbons, and streamers. These light, flexible materials add a visual and tactile stimulus to the learning experience. Children enjoy handling these materials and observing the visual patterns they create as their bodies bend, stretch, twist, and turn in the space around them. Locomotor skills can be used in combination with these materials. Children can manipulate them as they skip, run, and leap across the floor.

Many children's rhymes also encourage the use of these locomotor and stability skills. Here are some examples:

Small as a mouse
Tall as a house
Wide as a gate
Thin as a pin.

I can run and I can stop/hop
I can spin 'round like a top
I can stretch my arms out wide
I can rock/slide from side to side.

Young children have vivid imaginations and love to 'pretend' to be something or someone else. Creative dance encourages these opportunities for self-expression. In addition, while 'pretending', children will be using their locomotor and stability skills. Young children enjoy 'pretending' to be birds, butterflies, aeroplanes, cars, lions, elephants, snakes, crabs, dogs, cats, trees, giants, and balls. Using books as a stimulus for this type of creative activity can be very useful. Books such as *Where the Forest Meets the Sea* (Baker, 1987), *Rainbow Fish to the Rescue* (Pfister, 1995), and *We're Going on a Bear*

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Hunt (Rosen & Oxenbury, 1993) provide plenty of scope for practising these skills.

Games

Games offer children opportunities to develop all three categories of fundamental movement skills. They have the added benefit of introducing children to simple rules and game strategies. The games outlined below are simple and require little organisation. They are not games in which children are eliminated during their participation so that an eventual 'winner' is found. Rather, they encourage inclusivity, cooperation, and high levels of physical activity.

Games encourage inclusivity, cooperation, and high levels of physical activity

Statues

Children in a group behind the carer/teacher/leader. As the leader walks away from the group, the children follow. When the leader turns around, the children stop and freeze. Anyone caught moving becomes the next leader or takes one step back. This game can also be put to music.

Are You There Brown Bear?

Brown bear (carer/teacher or child), is asleep at one end of the playing space. The children creep up behind brown bear and ask, *Are you there brown bear?* If brown bear replies, *Yes I am,* the bear chases the children 'home'. The first child caught becomes the new brown bear.

The Big Green Dragon

The big green dragon (the carer/teacher), stands at one end of the play space. Children creep up behind the dragon. The dragon says:

I'm a big green dragon
In my dragons's lair
By the time I count to three
You'd better not be there.
One ... two ... three ...

On the count of three the dragon turns and chases the children. The first child to be caught becomes the next dragon.

Here, There, Everywhere, Nowhere

Children find 'a spot alone' in a large, open space. Children listen and respond to carer/teacher's calls. For example, when *here* is called, children run towards the leader; on *there,* children run to where carer/teacher points; on *everywhere,* children run anywhere in the

open space; on *nowhere*, children stop and balance on one leg or the body part called.

Six- to eight-year-old children can be introduced to a greater variety of locomotor and ball games. These children are ready to grasp the idea that not everyone does the same thing in a game, and that many games are played in small groups. The following games are suitable for junior primary children:

Six- to eight-year-old children can be introduced to a greater variety of locomotor and ball games

Autumn Ball

Circles of 6–8 children. A ball is thrown around the circle to each child. As the ball is thrown, the children and/or carer recite the following rhyme:

Red, orange, yellow and brown
Watch me run the ball around.

The child who receives the ball on 'around' runs quickly around the circle and back to their place. The game begins again.

Fill the Bucket

Children are within the playing space. The teacher throws or rolls balls into the playing space, while the children try to catch, stop, and return the balls to the bucket. The aim is to keep the bucket full.

Odds and Evens

The class is divided into two groups. One group is called 'odds', the other group is called 'evens'. When the teacher calls out *odds*, the 'odds' run in and out of the 'evens,' who stand still. When the teacher calls out *evens*, the 'evens' run in and out of the 'odds', who stand still. When *odds and evens* are called, both groups run freely within the playing space.

Catch the Bunny

Two balls of different sizes are required for this game. The smaller ball represents the 'bunny' while the larger ball is the 'farmer'. Children stand in a circle. The 'bunny' starts first and is passed around the circle. When the 'bunny' is half-way around the circle, the 'farmer' starts being passed around the circle. The aim of the game is to see if the 'farmer' can catch the 'bunny'. The game may be made more challenging by starting the 'farmer' sooner or allowing the 'farmer' and the 'bunny' to change direction around the circle.

Obstacle courses

Obstacle courses are of great interest to children who are curious to test their locomotor and stability skills when

climbing over, under, along, around, and off equipment. An obstacle course may be set up either indoors or outdoors. While commercially-made equipment is best for outdoor use, the use of objects such as large cardboard boxes, tables, chairs, cushions, and material can be used for indoor courses. Indoor obstacle courses are of great value when wet weather prevails. Obstacle courses which are designed around the events in a book can provide extra motivation. For example, *Rosie's Walk* (Hutchins, 1982), and *Spot's Walk in the Woods* (Hill, 1995).

Play stations

The play stations model recognises the importance of quality instruction in fundamental movement skill development. It provides a planned, playful approach to practising all three fundamental skill categories. As its name suggests, this model is characterised by playful movement at activity stations. The stations may be designed as free play, structured play, and/or teacher-directed play activities. The teacher-directed play station provides opportunity for specific skill instruction. The play stations model is designed to be used over a series of lessons and operates similarly to a sports tabloid arrangement, with small groups of children spending some five minutes at an activity station before being given the signal to rotate to the next (EDWA, 1997). With young children, it is necessary to use teacher assistants, parent helpers, older children, or simple task cards to guide activities at the structured play stations. With some extra thought, the play station may be planned around a particular theme. This is best illustrated in the outdoor 'fire' play station model described below. While it includes a variety of movement experiences, its main focus is on the development of the stability skill of body rolling.

Play station model: Fire theme

Role play: Children pretend they are members of the fire brigade (firefighters).

Skill instruction focus: Sideways rolling (pencil roll)

Skill and concept revision: Balance-walking, running and changing direction quickly, keeping low and crawling to safety, using water to put out a fire.

Station 1: Free play in open space with a variety of small equipment such as balls, beanbags, plastic catchers, hoops *(firefighters must keep active and physically fit)*.

Station 2: Structured play. Children balance-walk along a series of carpet patches or benches. Halfway along the patches/benches they must stop, pick up *(rescue)* a soft toy, and carry it to safety along the remaining carpet patches/bench.

Station 3: Teacher-directed play. Teacher instructs children (modelling) on correct body placement for sideways rolling. Children model squeezing arms and legs together while lying on their back, rocking side to side in this long, tight body shape, eventually rocking into a sideways roll *(fire safety drill: stop, drop and roll)*.

Station 4: Structured play. Children fill small containers with water from a bucket and run to empty it in a container some 10 metres distant *(put out the fire)*. They run quickly to return and repeat the process. Beanbags may be used in place of water.

Station 5: Structured play. Children practise crawling under a variety of obstacles—chair, table, rope, large piece of supported material *(in a smoke-filled room keep low and crawl to safety)*.

The play station model, with its balance between play and instruction, is ideal for use in early childhood movement programs. When integrated with topics or themes explored in the classroom, the play station model becomes even more appropriate for children.

Teaching tips

Providing children with a variety of movement experiences will undoubtedly help them to become more confident movers. However, movement experiences alone will not guarantee that children master fundamental movement skills. Nor do they guarantee that children will wish to continue their participation in physical activity. Sensitive and developmentally appropriate practice is also needed. This section outlines some teaching tips for engaging and supporting children's interest in physical activity. These suggestions are based on the recommendations made in 1992 by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (Gallahue, 1995). Ultimately, an early childhood movement program aims to help children develop competent motor skills so they will be motivated to make physical activity part of their lifestyle.

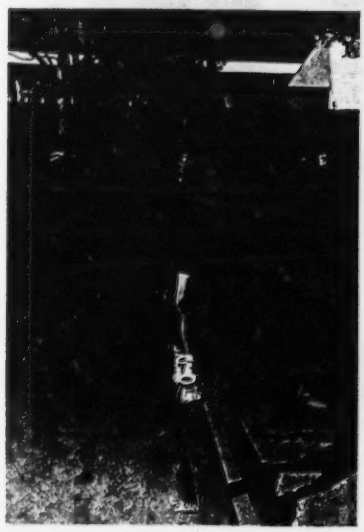
- Include explicit teaching of fundamental movement skills as part of your movement program. Complement this fundamental movement skill instruction with daily gross motor play opportunities.
- Become knowledgeable about fundamental movement skills. Specifically, get to know the components of these skills and be able to competently assess children's performance in all three categories. Fundamental movement skill resources published by the Departments of Education in Victoria (1996) and Western Australia (1997) are excellent sources of information (see Resources, p.18).
- The teacher's enthusiastic approach to movement sessions will be immediately recognised by the children.

Become knowledgeable about fundamental movement skills so you can competently assess children's performance in all three categories

- Provide children with positive feedback about their motor performances. Make your comments positive and specific, e.g. 'That was a great throw, Sally. Remember to look at the target each time.'
- Take an active role during the movement session: join in the session where possible, perform movements to the best of your ability. Children will be using the teacher as a model. Engage with children during supervision. Give support and encouragement to achievements.
- Safety must be considered a priority when planning movement activities and physical play settings. For example, always have children experience movement activities on the ground before extending to exploration on equipment.
- Provide sufficient equipment to encourage high levels of physical activity. Children become bored while waiting in lines for a turn. While this may develop compliance, it is correct instruction and practice that will develop proficient movers.
- Avoid elimination games. In many cases, children who are eliminated first are the very ones who most need to practise their motor skills.
- Encourage children to talk about physical activity. Talk about the games they play with their family and friends and the activities they participate in after school. Invite them to teach the class one of their favourite games or dances.
- Display photographs and pictures of people participating in various physical activities.
- Where possible, integrate movement experiences with other classroom activities or themes. This multi-sensory approach to learning will not only make their movement experiences more motivating but also more relevant and meaningful.
- Introduce music where possible to enrich children's movement experiences. Rhythm is an essential element of much coordinated movement.

Avoid elimination games—in many cases, children who are eliminated first are the very ones who most need to practise their motor skills

Finish your movement lessons with a 'cool down' or relaxation activity, for example:



Rhymes which encourage slower actions

All join hands and give a sigh
Now slowly reach up high
Let go hands and turn around
And curl slowly to the ground.

Two little feet go tap, tap, tap
Two little hands go clap, clap, clap
One little body turns around
One little body sits quietly down.

Imaginative activities

Have children imagine being a feather floating softly to the ground; being a piece of elastic which is sometimes stretched or relaxed on the floor; or an ice-cream melting slowly to the floor.

Partner activities

Children sit or stand facing a partner, with palms touching their partner's palms. Have one partner be the 'leader' who leads the 'follower's' hands, making patterns in the air in front of their bodies. The 'follower' closes their eyes. Have partners sit back-to-back. Encourage children to become aware of their partner's body and how it is starting to slow down and become more relaxed.

Conclusion

Movement is an important part of the lives and education of the young children in our care. Research has shown that proficiency in fundamental movement skills is an essential outcome of early childhood education. Furthermore, the learning characteristics of children between the ages of four and eight dictate that movement skills need to be taught in an enjoyable and instructional learning environment.

Children's involvement in physical activity will not only have health benefits, but will also significantly contribute to their self-esteem and pro-social skills

The views outlined in this book are based on what is considered to be best practice for young children. By offering children opportunities for both planned and spontaneous movement experiences, we can help them develop movement skills which will allow participation in a wide range of sports and activities. Their involvement in physical activity will not only have health benefits, but will also significantly contribute to their self-esteem and pro-social skills. Movement experiences for young children should focus on the basic stability, locomotor, and manipulative skills which are the building blocks for more complex movement skills. By stressing the joy of physical activity, positive behaviours are developed that should last a lifetime.

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